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ABSTRACT

This publication presents the evaluation of the Secondary Special Education Initiative, a 5-year partnership between the New Jersey State Department of Education and nine school districts. The initiative was established in 1983 to enhance the development of high-school programs and services for educationally handicapped pupils. The initiative had as its goals the improvement of basic skills achievement in reading and mathematics, a decrease in the dropout rate for participating students, and an increase in post-graduation employment for participating students. In addition, each district agreed to be involved in collaborative planning, sharing, development, evaluation, and dissemination activities with the State Department of Education and with the other project districts. The report details the goals of the initiative, explains the collaborative roles of the department and project districts, describes individual project successes of five of the school districts, and identifies the strategies that enabled specific project districts to achieve one or more of its goals. Ten strategies that brought about goal achievement are presented, such as: student involvement in activities that simulate experiences of the work world; low pupil/teacher ratio; behavior and social improvement; and intensive individual, group, and family counseling. A directory of the nine school districts and contact persons is provided, as well as names and contact information for two resource persons for project assistance. (JDD)

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Successful Special Education Programs in the High School

New Jersey State Department of Education
Division of Special Education

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BREAKTHROUGH:

SUCCESSFUL SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN THE HIGH SCHOOL

New Jersey's

Secondary Special Education Initiative

FINAL REPORT

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FOREWORD

This publication presents the evaluation of a five year initiative established by the New Jersey State Department of Education in 1983 to enhance the development of high school programs and services for educationally handicapped pupils. The Secondary Special Education Initiative was characterized by a unique partnership between the department and nine local school districts.

Three of the projects resulting from the initiative received national recognition. Pennsville's Project S.E.E.D. and Woodbridge's Project A.L.I.V.E. were identified as exemplary by Programs that are Exemplary in Education and Rehabilitation, the PEER Regional Network. Morris Hills' Project Strive was selected by the University of Wisconsin to participate in a national dissemination program as an outstanding vocational program.

I wish to thank the participating districts for their efforts to improve special education programs and services at the high school level.

Over its five years, this initiative involved the expertise and dedication of many staff members. When the initiative was first conceived in 1983, a planning committee was formed which worked together for over a year. Later, this committee developed into a standing committee within the Division of Special Education which was dedicated to the implementation of the initiative. I would like to acknowledge the following people from the Department of Education who participated in a significant way in this initiative: Edward Dragan (who managed the overall initiative), Joyce Boose, Isaac Bryant, Ernest Cole, John Curtis, Cathleen Doyle, June Ejk, Raymond A. Long, Eugene Mason, Paquita Roberts, Arlene Roth, Kathleen Rotter, Teryle Wilder, and Amanda Wright. I would also like to acknowledge Regina Barna and Kathleen Regan who provided assistance with the content review of this report. Additionally, Melvina Flounoy, Shirley Witkowski and Debra Wysocki provided secretarial support services.

My thanks to them and to the staff of the participating districts who sought to deliver more successful programs and services to their high schools.

Jeffrey V. Osowski, Director
Division of Special Education

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CHAPTER ONE OVERVIEW

Educators want to see all high school students enter the adult world prepared to cope with life's demands, work productively and pursue new goals, including further education. Broad-based educational reform and improvement plans instituted at the high school level have advanced this aim for some students but not always for those considered educationally handicapped. Many handicapped students exhibit high absenteeism and frequently drop out, leaving school with insufficient knowledge and inadequate life and work skills.

In 1983, the New Jersey State Department of Education, Division of Special Education, decided that there was a need to develop an initiative to address this issue. A plan was written and a request for proposal (RFP) was offered as a competitive grant to New Jersey districts with high schools beginning with the 1985-86 school year. Proposals were to:

(1) address student outcomes in the areas of academic achievement, dropout rate and employment after graduation;

(2) specify enhancement or improvement of program offerings for the handicapped student population; and

(3) include an evaluation component relative to the project outcomes.

Ninety-two of approximately 300 high school districts in the state submitted applications to participate in the Secondary Special Education Initiative. Each district that applied was required to complete a needs statement, determine program objectives, develop an evaluation plan, construct a budget, and project staff needs. Each district submitted its own plan of action to implement its program objectives. These plans varied widely and were not directed by the department. A department committee screened and ranked the applications and made the selection for grant awards.

The basis for this initiative was to improve program and service delivery within existing state regulations. The project was not intended for districts with major or widespread deficiencies that needed corrective actions in order to meet basic regulatory requirements.

Funding for the initiative was provided by the department through the use of Public Law 94-142 Education of the Handicapped Act, Part B, Support Funds. The funds were used to launch each project and to encourage its continuation through the course of the initiative. The implementation schedule was as follows: Each district's project, in accordance with its approved budget and activities, was fully funded by the department for school year 1985-86, the first year of the initiative. In school years 1986-87 and 1987-88, the program development years, and in 1988-89, the final initiative year that included evaluation and dissemination activities, the department decreased the funding of each project at a

CHAPTER ONE OVERVIEW

progressive rate until half-funding was reached. At the same time, each district assumed its own funding so that in the final initiative year, each district funded half of its own project.

The last year of state funding for this initiative was 1988-89. For the year following the initiative, 1989-90, each district continued successful project components at its own expense. Initial acceptance into the initiative had also included the requirement that each district serve as a demonstration site, publish information and provide consultation services to secondary districts requesting such services.

The yearly application and approval process assured that necessary individual project revisions were made which kept program goals in focus.

The secondary districts that participated in this project through its duration are:

- **Cumberland Regional, Cumberland County**
- **Dover Public Schools, Morris County**
- **Lakeland Regional, Passaic County**
- **Lower Camden Regional, Camden County**
- **Montclair Public Schools, Essex County**
- **Morris Hills Regional, Morris County**
- **Pennsville Township Public Schools, Salem County**
- **Upper Freehold Regional, Monmouth County**
- **Woodbridge Township Public Schools, Middlesex County**

This report details the goals of the initiative, explains the collaborative roles of the department and project districts, describes individual project successes and identifies the strategies that enabled specific project districts to achieve one or more of the goals of the initiative.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SECONDARY SPECIAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE

The Secondary Special Education Initiative was formulated on the premise that the Department of Education and local school districts could work together in effecting educational improvement. Implementation activities were based on the following goals:

- improve basic skills achievement in reading and mathematics on standardized tests for students participating in the project by 10 Normal Curve Equivalents (NCEs);*
- decrease the dropout rate for students participating in the project by 15 percentage points;
- increase post-graduation employment for students participating in the project by 15 percentage points.

In addition, each district agreed to be involved in collaborative planning, sharing, development, evaluation, and dissemination activities with the Department of Education and with the other project districts. These responsibilities included participation in:

- the RFP and contract process which constituted the annual agreement between the district and the division;
- four annual project director meetings hosted by the department and composed of the project directors and department staff. At the meetings information was shared, issues were discussed, and problems were solved;
- the department's annual, statewide secondary special education conference targeted for high school administrators, directors of special services, child study team members, parents, teachers, and guidance personnel. The project districts, through the project director, participated in the planning of each conference. They also presented and disseminated information pertaining to their project; and
- evaluation activities, including self-evaluation, the results of which were disseminated in publications developed by the districts.

The goals of the Secondary Special Education Initiative were high. Districts that achieved one or more of the goal standards made highly significant educational breakthroughs.

*Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) refers to a derived score based on an equal interval scale. The NCE allows for comparison between different achievement test batteries and between different tests in the same battery. [California Achievement Tests, Forms E and F, Norms Book, September through November, CTB/McGraw Hill: Monterey, California (1986), p. 8.]

CHAPTER TWO

THE SECONDARY SPECIAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE

This report describes those project elements that resulted in educational breakthroughs and identifies the underlying educational strategies the districts developed and implemented to attain the results. In this sense, this is a report on "what works" in special education at the secondary level. The report, then, does not describe project elements in the initiative which did not meet the initiative's criterion levels, even though sizable gains in the goal areas were made. This valuable information, however, is available in each district's dissemination information.

The Secondary Special Education Initiative was a unique school program. The department and the project districts pioneered an improvement process which emphasized collaborative planning and management by the state and local education agencies.

CHAPTER THREE

RINGING THE SCHOOL BELL

Five of the nine project districts "rang the school bell" - they succeeded in reaching one or more of the initiative standards and, hence, achieved educational breakthroughs. They improved special education programs and services as evidenced by improved basic skill performance, increased employment and/or decreased dropout rate. The five districts that achieved highly significant changes in pupil performance in specific areas are:

- **Cumberland Regional - increased employment**
- **Morris Hills Regional - increased employment**
- **Lakeland Regional - decreased dropout rate**
- **Woodbridge Township - increased employment and decreased dropout rate**
- **Upper Freehold Regional - increased basic skills**

Cumberland Regional
High School District:
Project World of Work (W.O.W.)

EMPLOYMENT

GOAL: **Increase post-graduation employment by 15 percentage points**

Conclusions:

- **Handicapped students learn vocational skills when districts provide a knowledgeable special education resource person in shop classes to help instruct the handicapped students and to support the regular shop teacher. The increased learning of vocational skills facilitates post-graduation employment.**

- **The setting of realistic academic and career goals supported by both a comprehensive counseling program and directed, sequential scheduling based on student need, contributes to improved grades and learning. Career preparation is thus improved and employment after graduation increased.**

- **Student involvement in activities that simulate experiences of the work world improves motivation, attitude and learning. This is evidenced by their increased esteem in the school community and their increased employment after leaving high school.**

The School District

Cumberland Regional is a rural district in Cumberland County with an enrollment of approximately 1,600 students. Seven districts including Deerfield Township, Fairfield Township, Greenwich Township, Hopewell Township, Shiloh, Stow Creek Township, and Upper Deerfield Township send their students to this comprehensive regional high school district. In focusing on post-secondary employment for its handicapped students, the district established a school support system to enhance job awareness and improve work related skills.

BREAKTHROUGH:

The most significant result for Project World of Work (W.O.W.) was a 16 percentage point increase in post-high school employment. At the end of the first year of the project, the district's six-month post-secondary employment survey showed that 55 percent of 30 graduates who responded to a district questionnaire were employed; by the end of the third year, 71 percent of 51 respondents were employed. During that same time period, Cumberland further noted that fewer handicapped students were dropping out: the dropout rate for these students decreased from 12.5 percent to 7 percent.

Cumberland Regional
High School District:
Project World of Work (W.O.W.)

EMPLOYMENT

GOAL: **Increase post-graduation employment by 15 percentage points**

How did this relatively small, rural high school district in a relatively high unemployment area make such gains in getting more students interested in school? How did this district help in preparing students for the work world so that six months after leaving high school, they were gainfully employed?

The district attributed its success to these important changes implemented through Project W.O.W.:

- the provision of a special education teacher to work with handicapped pupils placed in its five vocational shops;
- the provision of career and academic counseling with vocational assessment by special counselors for handicapped pupils;
- the provision of a self-contained special education class with a simulated work focus for emotionally disturbed students.

A close look at each of these changes in the school's operation may be helpful to districts interested in achieving similar results.

The Special Education Teacher in Vocational Shops

The teacher of the handicapped worked on a rotating basis within five vocational shops - Industrial Arts I (Woodshop), Industrial Arts II (Metal Shop), Building Trades I and II, Power Mechanics and Vocational Agriculture. Scheduling was done on a weekly basis according to the needs of the students and the vocational instructors. Individual assistance was provided directly to handicapped students in the regular shop environment. The assistance included individual help in following directions, project layout, measurements and test preparation. When necessary, tests were administered orally. Because of the daily interaction between the special education teacher and the vocational instructors, the instructors experienced greater success in teaching classified mainstreamed students.

The presence of the special education teacher supported the vocational teacher and had a positive effect on student motivation, interest and skills, as evidenced by improved student grades in vocational classes as well as

EMPLOYMENT

GOAL: **Increase post-graduation employment by 15 percentage points**

increased post-secondary employment. Prior to Project W.O.W.'s inception, 43 percent of classified students earned "C" or above. For the 1985-86 school year, the figure rose to 65 percent, returned to 60 percent in 1986-87 and for 1987-88 increased to 75 percent achieving a "C" or better.

Academic and Career Counseling with Vocational Assessment

Project W.O.W. worked with the assumption that students with attainable academic and career goals would be motivated to (1) remain in school; (2) experience increased academic success and improved career preparation and; (3) be employed after graduation.

To these ends, Project W.O.W. required that all ninth-grade students participate in the Pictorial Inventory of Careers (PIC) to target students' vocational interests. Additionally, the Talent Assessment Program (TAP), an aptitude assessment, consisting of 10 work samples, was administered to the full-time special education class which was a self-contained class of ninth-grade students who were classified as emotionally disturbed. All handicapped students were counseled twice a year for the purpose of career planning in addition to their regular guidance sessions, thus assuring appropriate program planning through the selection of sequential course offerings modified, when necessary, in accordance with each student's need. The academic counseling component provided for the monitoring of student progress and the opportunity of early intervention when problems arose. Included in the counseling component were liaison activities between home and school and among departments within the school.

Self-contained Class with a Simulated Work Focus for Emotionally Disturbed Students

The intent of this component of Project W.O.W. was to improve student motivation; to increase time on task; and to develop positive work habits and attitudes. Simulation, a teaching strategy that makes learning in school close to the real world experience, was the primary instructional method for the program. The students studied mass production principles; chose a project to manufacture such as cutting boards, mirrors, frames, or book racks; developed a production plan and worked on the assembly.

EMPLOYMENT

GOAL: **Increase post-graduation employment by 15 percentage points**

They participated in the advertising, packaging and sale of their products. Profits from the sales, approximately $800 a year, were reinvested for future projects. The students, individually, were able to earn rewards based on their work performance and behavior, through an incentive system. This point system provided students with the opportunity to purchase items, such as movie or pizza coupons, at the end of each week when the points were tallied.

An interesting dividend resulted from this component of Project W.O.W.: an enhanced image of the students developed in the school community because of their improved behavior and their contribution of useful products.

Morris Hills Regional
High School District:
Project Strive

EMPLOYMENT

GOAL: **Increase post-graduation employment by 15 percentage points**

Conclusions:

- **Handicapped students learn vocational skills when districts provide a knowledgeable special education resource person in shop classes to help instruct the handicapped student and to support the regular shop teachers. The increased learning of vocational skills facilitates post-graduation employment.**

  (This conclusion was also reached in the Cumberland project.)

- **The setting of realistic academic and career goals supported by both a comprehensive counseling program and directed, sequential scheduling based on student need, contributes to improved grades and learning. Career preparation is thus improved and employment after graduation increased.**

  (This conclusion was also reached in the Cumberland project.)

- **The development of a school communication network of involved staff that focuses on employment for handicapped students who are in either part-time or full-time special education programs, results in: (1) the students receiving the education necessary to acquire employment skills and to be employed after graduation; (2) their parents receiving the education and information necessary for them to assist their children in career and job choices.**

The School District

The suburban Morris Hills Regional High School District has two high schools with approximately 2,200 students. It is a receiving district for four surrounding Morris County districts, including Denville Township; Rockaway Borough; Rockaway Township and Wharton Borough. It is also a regional area vocational/technical school district.

A district needs assessment determined that additional support services to both handicapped students and the regular teaching staff were necessary to decrease the vulnerability of special education students failing courses and leaving school. The district's Project Strive included three important elements:

- the provision of a vocational/special education teacher to work with handicapped pupils placed in vocational classes;

- the provision of special education guidance counselors;
- the provision of a unique program described by the district as an "alternative school."

BREAKTHROUGH:

As a result of Project Strive, there was a 46 percentage point increase in post-secondary employment for handicapped individuals. This accomplishment did not come easily to the district. The first six-month post-secondary employment survey revealed that only half of the respondents were employed. The final employment survey, however, showed that all but one respondent was employed. Thus, a final 95 percent employment rate was accomplished - an improvement of almost 46 percentage points over the first year.

The dropout rate for handicapped students also improved. At the end of the first project year, the special education student dropout rate was almost four times that of regular education students - more than 11 percent compared to 3 percent. By the end of the third full project year, the handicapped pupil dropout rate declined by 8.5 percentage points and approximated that of regular education.

<u>The Vocational Resource Support Teacher</u>

A teacher certified to teach the handicapped and vocational education provided direct services to classified students and to teachers in the industrial arts and vocational/technical programs and cooperative work study programs. Through a referral process, teachers were able to request a variety of services from the vocational resource teacher. These services included observation and consultation pertaining to a particular student, direct classroom instruction for one or more students, and short term out-of-class instruction on a particular skill or procedure for one or several students. The vocational resource teacher developed and reinforced, when necessary, the basic skills for students to succeed in particular settings. The vocational resource teacher also provided alternate testing procedures such as oral presentation or extended working time for students needing such adaptations. As a resource person to teachers, the vocational resource teacher provided alternative strategies and materials for use in classes. The vocational resource teacher was also responsible for

administering the Apticom Interest and Aptitude Tests to handicapped students. These test results were shared with students, parents, and the special counselor. Together with the vocational resource teacher's observations of students' abilities and performance in classes, these results provided information that helped to assure educational programming based on student needs. The vocational resource teacher also developed and taught a new prevocational course, Tool Technology, to meet the needs of lower functioning handicapped students.

The district's Project Strive report showed that 90 percent of the 152 students who received ongoing support from the vocational resource teacher for the 1986-87 school year successfully completed course requirements. The trend continued for the 1987-88 school year with 84 percent of the students who received support, passing their courses. Handicapped students who did not pass courses during the school year had a summer school opportunity to do so. In the summer program of 1987, 30 handicapped students made up courses and in the summer program of 1988, 38 handicapped students made up courses.

Special Education Counselors

Each of the district's high schools had a certified counselor for students with special needs. The counselors functioned as the primary contact with students, teachers, child study team members, administrators and parents. The counselors set up weekly meetings and prepared the agenda with the child study team, thus coordinating the monitoring of student academic performance, attendance and behavior. They reviewed and analyzed information gathered from teachers, child study team members, the vocational resource teacher and parents for discussion at the child study team meetings. As liaisons, the counselors assisted in facilitating the recommendations of the child study team. Because of their knowledge about each classified student, the Project Strive special counselors were able to plan for and guide students and parents in the selection of sequential program offerings that enabled students to acquire the marketable skills necessary to enter the world of work.

The Project Strive special counselors also had middle school responsibilities. They assisted in all planning meetings with the child study team, students and parents. These meetings helped to ensure that each student's educational program and schedule would meet his/her

needs in the high school. Eleventh and 12th grade students and their parents also benefited from evening meetings organized to plan for employment and for education after high school. These meetings, presented by the Project Strive special counselors, focused on post-high school assistance options including career seminars, the district's post-secondary job program and continuing education for the learning disabled. A continuing education publication was developed for students by the Project Strive special counselors. The special counselors, providers of group, individual and crisis counseling, were largely responsible for developing a comfortable, caring environment at the high school level for handicapped students. Their roles emphasized early intervention, positive reinforcement for improvement, including "praise letters" when appropriate, and close personal contact with students and parents.

The Flex School Program

The Project Strive Flex School program, a kind of school within a school, was reserved for those handicapped students who were classified as emotionally disturbed and those who were manifesting disruptive behaviors to the extent that self-contained, full-time special education placement or out-of-district placement would be likely placements, if the Flex School program was not available. The ninth and 10th grade students in this program were prone to course failure and were vulnerable to school dropout. Student referral to the program occurred as a result of one or more of the following reasons:

- poor attendance;
- credit deficiency;
- lack of academic or vocational success; and
- behavior problems interfering with the learning process.

The Project Strive Flex School program did not remove students from their present program which could include regular education and vocational classes plus resource room. It provided additional individualized instruction with a teacher of the handicapped and/or the vocational resource teacher for two periods a day which afforded them an eight period day. The additional instructional periods gave the students an

EMPLOYMENT

GOAL: **Increase post-graduation employment by 15 percentage points**

opportunity to earn credit toward graduation in courses of English, United States History, Life Science, Mathematics, and Tool Technology/ Introduction to Vocations. The courses had written, board of education approved, curriculum. Support personnel, such as the special counselors and child study team, were available at scheduled times each week to assist the students. The school psychologist, for example, met weekly with them, to develop problem solving and decision making skills. Parental involvement was encouraged through frequent telephone contact to review their child's progress and/or any developing problems. Student academic classes were monitored every two weeks through a progress report to the special counselors.

The Project Strive Flex School accommodated students, the underlying philosophy being that the program should fit the student. This philosophy paid off. Each student's program was planned to best meet the student's needs. Scheduling was flexible. It was recognized that some students would benefit from a later hour start. The Flex School students' school day began at 10 a.m. Their day was concluded at 3:45 p.m. With flexible scheduling, the student and counselor could select a later starting time, organize the school day around the student's mid-day job or extend the student's day/year beyond the regular length so that the student could make up lost credits and regain class status. Fitting the program to the student, like tailoring a suit to a customer, is a personalized as well as an individualized effort. It resulted in increased student satisfaction and improved performance: students translated the efforts into an increased sense of self-worth and the perception of a caring environment. The resulting increase in learning affected post-secondary employment opportunities.

Six students were served in the Project Strive Flex School program for school year 1986-87 and 11 students, for 1987-88. In the first year, students reduced their total absences from an average of 42.5 days per student to an average of 18 days per student. During the course of that year, the students earned an average of 27 credits each. Similarly, in the next year, the second group increased its average earned credits by 15 credits per student. A 1989 follow-up of the 17 students in this program showed the following: two moved out of the district; five dropped out of school; five went to out-of-district private school placements; and five were able to return to the regular high school program. As a result of Project Strive, 10 of 17 high-risk students, those pupils the district identified as likely to leave school prior to graduation, were able to continue their high school education.

Morris Hills Regional
High School District:
Project Strive

EMPLOYMENT

GOAL: **Increase post-graduation employment by 15 percentage points**

Fitting the program to the student; providing directed, sequential scheduling based on student performance and need; providing a variety of educational experiences; providing alternate educational courses as Tool Technology; and innovating the development of a school communication network of involved staff, all represent the collective intervention strategies introduced through Project Strive.

The district's progress in providing for educationally handicapped students was recognized nationally. In February 1987 the Vocational Studies Center of the University of Wisconsin selected Project Strive to be one of 12 model special vocational education programs in the nation. The project was subsequently included in a training manual, Profiles of Success, published by the university.

Lakeland Regional High School:
Project Lakeland Alternative
High School (L.A.H.S.)

DROPOUT RATE

GOAL: **Decrease the dropout rate by 15 percentage points**

Conclusions:

- **Intensive counseling consisting of individual, group and family components provided in the student's school day and after school assists students in managing home and school problems. They become motivated to remain in school because of these valuable services. The school dropout rate for handicapped students is decreased.**

- **For programs for students at risk of dropping out, the programs that afford a low pupil/teacher ratio, that focus on behavior improvement, that consider social improvement and develop employment skills, provide a supportive environment that results in improved attendance and lower dropout rates.**

The School District

Lakeland Regional High School, with an enrollment of approximately 1,400 pupils, is a rural district located in northeast Passaic County and is a receiving district for students from the Wanaque and Ringwood School Districts. The district had identified a need for program enhancement for its emotionally disturbed students as early as 1981 and had developed its own program of intervention strategies. The district's inclusion in the Secondary Special Education Initiative enabled it to strengthen counseling services; to introduce a career/vocational component; and to augment its current curriculum.

With the inception of the initiative, the district's program was expanded to include perceptually and/or neurologically impaired students. Project Lakeland Alternative High School (L.A.H.S.) was housed in two facilities: an off-campus site for emotionally disturbed resident and tuition students; and a main-campus site for the resident perceptually and/or neurologically impaired students who met the district's criteria for being "at-risk." These main-campus students were included in what the district termed its transition program, actually departmentalized special education classes, as well as its cooperative industrial education (CIE) program, which was provided at both sites. The target populations for both programs included handicapped high school students and, at the off-campus site, handicapped students grades seven through 12. This meant that junior high school students as well as high school aged students could participate in Project L.A.H.S. The data collected at the end of the first full implementation year of the initiative, 1985-86, showed that the district was still experiencing a very high dropout rate of 36 percent for

handicapped students at the off-campus site as compared to a 4 percent rate for all students.

BREAKTHROUGH:

By the end of the final full implementation year, 1987-88, the Lakeland School District decreased the dropout rate to 11 percent for pupils in Project L.A.H.S., a 25 percentage points improvement over the baseline year. It appears that the district did gain significantly in its ability to keep students in school. The district identified those aspects of Project L.A.H.S. that affected its ability to keep more students in school as:

- the provision of individual, group, family and crisis counseling;
- the provision of program management strategies.

Counseling Services

At both the off-campus and main-campus sites of Project L.A.H.S., individual and group counseling were provided a minimum of one time weekly for each student by a school psychologist and/or a school social worker. Individual counseling by the designated psychologist or social worker for what the district called "at-risk" handicapped students, those most vulnerable to dropout, was provided more frequently if required in the student's individualized education program (IEP). Crisis and family counseling were available to all students in Project L.A.H.S. on an as needed basis during and after school hours.

Program Management Strategies

Both programs of Project L.A.H.S., the one off-campus and the one at the main-campus, had a low pupil/teacher ratio. The off-campus program maximum class size was eight with a teacher of the handicapped and a certified teacher aide assigned. The transition program classes (the departmentalized special education program) and the CIE class sizes also had a maximum of eight students with an appropriately certified teacher.

The behavior management system at the off-campus site included reinforcement in the form of points for appropriate behavior. The points

were converted to a money value and recorded in a student account. Students were able to draw on their accounts to purchase items from a select group of available options. A minimum balance had to be kept in each student's account.

The district reported that when students returned to the main-campus, the Project L.A.H.S. transitional classes contributed to improved student adjustment to the high school environment. The Project L.A.H.S. transitional classes were departmentalized courses with curriculum in the areas of mathematics, English, social studies, science, physical education/health and business education. The district stated that the inclusion of business education in the transitional classes program contributed to improved student attitude and their desire to remain in school.

Apparently, the departmentalized special education classes were an effective way to prepare special education students, who had been in out-of-district placements or in full-time self-contained special education classes, for their return to regular education classes. The smaller, departmentalized special education classes continued support while returning the student to regular curriculum demands and to the larger school community environment.

Both programs of Project L.A.H.S. featured monthly field trips to local business sites to promote educational growth and career awareness and to provide the opportunity for social interaction.

Project L.A.H.S. also provided the CIE program at both sites. The CIE program included assessment, placement and follow-up services.

INCREASED EMPLOYMENT AND DECREASED DROPOUT RATE

Woodbridge Township
School District:
Project Avenel Learning Institute for Vocational Education (A.L.I.V.E.)

GOALS:
- **Increase post-graduation employment by 15 percentage points**
- **Decrease the dropout rate by 15 percentage points**

Conclusions:

- **A discipline system that assists the student in learning appropriate classroom behavior and assists the teacher in learning successful classroom strategies, not only improves classroom climate and student learning but also leads to increased post-graduation employment and a decreased student dropout rate.**

- **Student involvement in activities that simulate experiences of the work world improves motivation, attitude and learning. This is evidenced by their increased esteem in the school community and their increased employment after leaving high school.**

  (This conclusion was also reached in the Cumberland Project.)

- **A career/vocational advisory group that provides mentorship in a school program assists students in learning about the expectations of the work world, resulting in increased post-graduation employment.**

The School District

The Woodbridge Township School District is classified as urban. It has three high schools and an alternative program located at the Avenel Learning Center (ALC). There are approximately 3,500 students in the high schools. The district was concerned about student behavior including truancy, peer relationship problems and difficulty in following school rules. In 1985-86, the baseline year of Project Avenel Learning Institute for Vocational Education (A.L.I.V.E.) implementation, the district reported a 23 percent dropout rate for handicapped students.

BREAKTHROUGH:

By the end of the third year of Project A.L.I.V.E., the dropout rate for handicapped students had decreased to 8 percent, an additional 15 percentage points decrease over the first, or baseline year. Similarly, the district's first post-secondary employment survey showed only half of the respondents were employed. By the end of Project A.L.I.V.E.'s third year, the employment rate of respondents was 73 percent, a 23 percentage points improvement.

Project A.L.I.V.E. was developed to provide the support systems necessary for a sensitive understanding of the unique needs of handicapped students. Two fundamental improvements resulted:

INCREASED EMPLOYMENT AND DECREASED DROPOUT RATE

Woodbridge Township
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GOALS:
- **Increase post-graduation employment by 15 percentage points**
- **Decrease the dropout rate by 15 percentage points**

- the provision of an alternative discipline program;
- the provision of an alternative school.

The Alternative Discipline System - In-School Suspension (ISS)

The district developed the In-School Suspension (ISS) program as an alternative discipline approach to suspension. The system required work completion and school attendance in a tutorial setting.

Soon after its inception, the program was organized and provided on a per period basis as well as a daily basis. Students who needed the program learned the ABCs (antecedents, behavior and consequences) of their inappropriate actions and developed, through a written contract system, a plan for behavioral improvement. The district reported that students learned to use contracts as a motivational device and to refer themselves to ISS as a "time out" retreat, a place to go to, and they also learned to value the opportunity to regain self-control.

The district stated that classroom climate was improved by ISS because of consultations between the ISS teacher and the classroom teachers regarding student needs and alternative strategies to deal with these students in the classroom.

The Alternative School: The Project A.L.I.V.E. 9-10 Manufacturing Company

Vocational activities provided a fundamental framework for Project A.L.I.V.E. and were designed to enhance employment skills, increase goal orientation and improve attendance. The Project A.L.I.V.E. 9 to 10 Manufacturing Company was a simulated corporation designed to provide students with a variety of work experiences.

In order to participate in Project A.L.I.V.E.'s 9 to 10 program, students followed job application procedures including applying and interviewing for specific jobs within the corporation. Production technology classes such as art, woods, metals, foods and office simulation provided the vocational basis of the company. Academic skills were reinforced in mathematics and English classes through the use of a specially designed

INCREASED EMPLOYMENT AND DECREASED DROPOUT RATE

Woodbridge Township
School District:
Project Avenel Learning Institute for
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GOALS:
- **Increase post-graduation employment by 15 percentage points**
- **Decrease the dropout rate by 15 percentage points**

Project A.L.I.V.E. 9 to 10 curriculum. Students were able to choose, design, manufacture and market a variety of products which included wooden fishing nets, wind mobiles, clocks, picnic furniture and other seasonal and special order items. The corporate structure of Project A.L.I.V.E.'s 9 to 10 program was composed of students serving as officers with an adult vocational career advisory committee comprised of educators and community business leaders providing input to maintain relevancy to the work world.

Other vocational activities included job follow-up, job sampling, interest and aptitude testing and a cooperative industrial education program. Students met individually with the guidance counselor in order to develop realistic post-graduation goals. Invited speakers from industry provided students with information concerning available employment opportunities.

Project A.L.I.V.E.'s 9 to 10 program provided a formal structure for students who were responsible for their own success or failure as well as 9 to 10's. Students had direct input to all aspects of the program. A common meeting time for the staff provided opportunities to share new ideas as well as information about individual students. The 9 to 10 curriculum ensured the relevancy of the mathematics and English classes to the production/vocational classes. A significant component of Project A.L.I.V.E.'s 9 to 10 program was the Vocational Career Advisory Committee which donated time, ideas and energy as well as manufacturing supplies. The committee functioned somewhat like an industrial board of directors. In addition to working with the company officers, members provided individual mentorship to students when requested; gave advisement to the professional staff on management, production and marketing matters; and donated manufacturing supplies, such as wood and paint. In some instances, the Vocational Career Advisory Committee members became employers of handicapped students before and following their graduation.

All these features led to the achievements associated with Project A.L.I.V.E.'s 9 to 10 Manufacturing Company. The 9 to 10 program directly affected Project A.L.I.V.E.'s goals of increased employment and decreased dropout rate. Parents, graduates and teachers confirmed that 9 to 10 resulted in increased feelings of self-worth, confidence and success for the students who developed skills which enabled them to be competitive in the world of work upon graduation.

BASIC SKILL IMPROVEMENT

Upper Freehold Regional
High School:
Project Support

GOAL: **Improve basic skills achievement in reading and mathematics by 10 Normal Curve Equivalents (NCEs)**

Conclusions:

- **Handicapped students learn academic skills when districts provide a knowledgeable special education resource person who has responsibility to students and to teachers in the teaching/learning process.**
- **A home/school/community communication system focused on academic, behavior and vocational concerns, results in academic improvement.**

The School District

Rural Upper Freehold Regional District includes Allentown Borough and Upper Freehold Township. It has a resident population of about 850 students. As a result of formal sending-receiving agreements, another Monmouth County district, Millstone Township, and an Ocean County district, Plumsted Township, as well as one Mercer County district, Washington Township, send their students to this high school district. These tuition students increase the district's size to about 1,400 students.

BREAKTHROUGH:

The district reported that of the approximately 100 handicapped students served by Project Support through its duration, there were 12 students who needed the services of the project for the entire four years (from their freshman through their senior year). A comparison of this group's mean and median NCE scores in reading and mathematics between their initial standardized testing (fall, 1985) and their final standardized testing (fall, 1988) for the project, showed that the district exceeded the initiative goal in three of the four academic measures and approximated, within one NCE, the fourth measure:

- **mathematics median, plus 16.0 NCEs**
- **mathematics mean, plus 18.0 NCEs**
- **reading median, plus 12.0 NCEs**
- **reading mean, plus 9.0 NCEs**

Thinking of this improvement in terms of grade level growth instead of NCEs becomes helpful because the amount of growth may be more

BASIC SKILL IMPROVEMENT

readily appreciated. **These 12 handicapped students in Project Support achieved a group mean improvement of 2.9 grade levels, from a grade 6.2 level in reading and mathematics in the fall of 1985 to a grade 9.1 level in reading and mathematics in the fall of 1988 on the district's standardized test measure.** This rate of improvement approximates the rate of growth of regular education students. It was anticipated that the students would progress another grade level by their June 1989 graduation, ensuring their meeting high school graduation requirements.

The district reported that Project Support's effective project components comprised a comprehensive communication system made up of:

- the provision of an academic consultant;
- the provision of a crisis psychologist;
- the provision of a self-contained classroom for emotionally disturbed students; and
- the provision of a career/vocational education program.

Academic Consultant Services

The Project Support special education academic consultant served as a program facilitator for all handicapped students at the high school, overseeing the development and implementation of individualized education programs (IEPs). The Project Support academic consultant provided direct services, such as diagnostic teaching and testing, to students. The academic consultant conducted regularly scheduled, as well as informal, consultations with all teaching staff including the basic skills, content area and career/vocational instructors. The focus of consultation was academic improvement but meetings included a variety of topics as student needs; instructional strategies and student learning styles; student assessment outcomes; and IEP implementation, review and revision. The academic consultant assisted administrators and guidance counselors and met, on a regular basis, with the child study team members. The academic consultant met with the parents of handicapped students to discuss their children's progress.

BASIC SKILL IMPROVEMENT

The role of the academic consultant included two other important features: staff development and community awareness training. The academic consultant organized and arranged for comprehensive staff development activities on topics such as educational (academic) management systems and instructional strategies/learning styles. These continuous training activities, primarily provided by the academic consultant and child study team members, enabled staff to learn effective strategies to increase the learning of handicapped students. Community awareness training, initially organized and presented by the academic consultant, brought individuals interested in helping handicapped high school students into the schools. These persons became mentors to handicapped students and, not infrequently, employers of handicapped students.

Crisis Psychologist Services

In order to combat student behavior problems, such as peer problems and/or not following school rules, exhibited by some of the district's handicapped population, the district implemented a comprehensive counseling system through Project Support that was provided by the school psychologist. The counseling system included:

- weekly, individual counseling;
- group counseling sessions to students identified by the child study team;
- crisis intervention, as needed; and
- training to all staff on crisis intervention techniques.

The student counseling aspect was very inclusive. Students were taught relaxation and biofeedback strategies as well as personal coping strategies to deal with peer pressures, family conflict and getting along well in school.

Secondary Program for Emotionally Disturbed Students

The goal of the full-time, self-contained, special education class was to give the students the academic and behavioral skills needed for them to return to the high school program and to be successful.

BASIC SKILL IMPROVEMENT

Upper Freehold Regional
High School:
Project Support

GOAL: **Improve basic skills achievement in reading and mathematics by 10 Normal Curve Equivalents (NCEs)**

Through Project Support, the district established a self-contained class, providing a full-time special education program for students classified as emotionally disturbed and in need of a highly structured setting. The class was set up to meet the needs of students who were identified as having highly aggressive behaviors. Prior to the project, the district did not offer this kind of program. Students exhibiting very agressive behaviors were likely to be sent out-of-district. The Project Support program provided a placement within the public school setting and provided extensive individualized services. Students worked under a clearly outlined behavior management system. Every student in the class met with the school psychologist at least weekly for individual counseling. Additionally, each student participated in group counseling on a daily basis.

Through the behavior management system, effort was made to develop each student's self-image. The student was kept constantly aware of his/her status by the teacher. The teacher identified the student's behavior as appropriate or inappropriate and the student's attitude as positive or negative in each academic undertaking. Therefore, on a given assignment, a student knew exactly how he/she performed. For example, the student might get a rating of "academic performance, excellent; behavior, appropriate; attitude, good." If a student questioned a grade, a "C," for example, the teacher would read a statement to the student: "C means that you attempted and completed most work satisfactorily but your attitude and behavior needs improvement." The teacher also had additional written explanations that were referred to as needed to settle any questioning. This system enabled the teacher and student to resolve a grade without rehashing the incident. The system assisted the students and teacher in resolving problems without disrupting the class. By consistent application of the grading system that was cumulative by the period, day and week, students and teachers had a constant opportunity to work toward academic and behavior improvement.

As can be seen, the system stressed academic as well as behavioral expectations. Student grades and behavior were reviewed on a daily basis. Parents were contacted at least weekly to be kept abreast of their child's progress.

BASIC SKILL IMPROVEMENT

Upper Freehold Regional High School: Project Support

GOAL: **Improve basic skills achievement in reading and mathematics by 10 Normal Curve Equivalents (NCEs)**

Career/Vocational Education Program

The goal of the career/vocational program was to help students with special needs make realistic career choices appropriate to their individual interests and abilities in addition to developing employment skills. It was targeted for handicapped students in 11th and 12th grades.

The career/vocational education component of Project Support had two components that complemented classroom instruction:

- career shadowing; and
- career guest speakers.

The career shadowing component gave students the opportunity to learn about job roles at the actual job site. Each job shadowing experience included a minimum of four two-hour visits by the student. If a student needed more visits to learn about a job or to come to a decision regarding his/her suitability for the job, additional visits were arranged. Each student who participated earned two credits in job shadowing experiences.

The career guest speakers component of the career/vocational education program provided handicapped students with another opportunity to become aware of a variety of careers, thus increasing their knowledge of career options. Videotaping the career guest speakers provided the students and the district with what was called "a living library" of information about various careers.

The career guest speakers members were community-minded people, organized through the special education academic consultant, with an interest in helping handicapped high school students. They also composed the career advisory council which served as an advisory body to the career/vocational education program. Their expertise and knowledge of the world of work guided the development of the program.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMING UP: WHAT WORKS

The goals of the Secondary Special Education Initiative were to:

- improve basic skills achievement for handicapped students in reading and mathematics by 10 Normal Curve Equivalents (NCEs);
- decrease the dropout rate for handicapped students by 15 percentage points;
- increase post-graduation employment for handicapped students by 15 percentage points.

Ten strategies that enabled the project districts to improve in these areas were identified in this report as conclusions: essentially, the conclusions are what works. Because the goals were discerning and because attaining a goal was an educational breakthrough, each strategy identified is highly significant. Diligent and appropriate application of the strategy can likely bring about improvement in other districts that adopt or adapt components of these projects. In other words, success may be anticipated as the result of applying a strategy identified in the Secondary Special Education Initiative in the context of new projects fitted to other districts.

The steps recommended to districts that want to make the necessary commitment to improve special education programs and service delivery in an initiative goal area follow:

Through the office of the local school superintendent, designated staff would:

(1) select one or more of the goal areas identified in this report;

(2) review the strategies - the conclusions - identified in this report which are applicable to the goals;

(3) review the relevant project descriptions described in this report;

(4) develop a district action plan complete with a statement of purpose/relevancy for each planned activity; timelines; responsibilities and measure(s) of effectiveness;

(5) review the plan with one of the project districts and/or with the Division of Special Education;

(6) obtain the local board of education approval of the plan and the board's commitment of sufficient funds for the project;

(7) train involved staff in areas relevant to the desired improvement;

(8) implement improvement activities in accordance with the plan;

(9) conduct ongoing assessment activities to be certain that progress toward the desired goal is being made;

(10) revise activities, at least annually, to become increasingly focused on successful goal achievement;

(11) conduct community and parent awareness training; develop support for the project through the involvement of persons who want to help improve the district's special education programs;

(12) develop student support by accepting valuable student input for developing and upgrading the project after it is implemented.

Each time a goal was reached in a project resulting from the Secondary Special Education Initiative, an educational breakthrough was made: therefore, the underlying strategy became highly significant. A summary of these highly significant strategies - the conclusions - follows:

Conclusions: **Number One**

- **Handicapped students learn vocational skills when districts provide a knowledgeable special education resource person in shop classes to help instruct the handicapped students and to support the regular shop teacher. The increased learning of vocational skills facilitates post-graduation employment.**

  (Cumberland Regional, Morris Hills Regional)

Number Two

- **The setting of realistic academic and career goals supported by both a comprehensive counseling program and directed, sequential scheduling based on student need, contributes to improved grades and learning. Career preparation is thus improved and employment after graduation increased.**

  (Cumberland Regional, Morris Hills Regional)

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMING UP: WHAT WORKS

Number Three

- **Student involvement in activities that simulate experiences of the work world improves motivation, attitude and learning. This is evidenced by their increased esteem in the school community and their increased employment after leaving high school.**

  (Cumberland Regional, Woodbridge Township)

Number Four

- **The development of a school communication network of involved staff that focuses on employment for handicapped students who are in either part-time or full-time special education programs, results in: (1) the students receiving the education necessary to acquire employment skills and to be employed after graduation; (2) their parents receiving the education and information necessary for them to assist their children in career and job choices.**

  (Morris Hills)

Number Five

- **Intensive counseling consisting of individual, group and family components provided in the student's school day and after school assists students in managing home and school problems. They become motivated to remain in school because of these valuable services. The school dropout rate for handicapped students is decreased.**

  (Lakeland)

Number Six

- **For programs for students at risk of dropping out, the programs that afford a low pupil/teacher ratio, that focus on behavior improvement, that consider social improvement and that develop employment skills, provide a supportive environment that results in improved attendance and lower dropout rates.**

  (Lakeland)

Number Seven

- **A discipline system that assists the student in learning appropriate classroom behavior and assists the teacher in learning successful classroom strategies, not only improves classroom climate and**

student learning but also leads to increased post-graduation employment and a decreased student dropout rate.

(Woodbridge Township)

Number Eight

- **A career/vocational advisory group that provides mentorship in a school program assists students in learning about the expectations of the work world, resulting in increased post-graduation employment.**

  (Woodbridge Township)

Number Nine

- **Handicapped students learn academic skills when districts provide a knowledgeable special education resource person who has responsibility to students and to teachers in the teaching/learning process.**

  (Upper Freehold)

Number Ten

- **A home/school/community communication system focused on academic, behavior and vocational concerns, results in academic improvement.**

  (Upper Freehold)

The bold and challenging Secondary Special Education Initiative is now concluded. The benefits of its successes, however, will help many handicapped students. To gain additional information and/or assistance, the reader should use the directory on the concluding pages.

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7. Dr. Ronald L. Capasso, Superintendent
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NOTES